

Hans-Jürgen Goertz, *Bruchstücke radikaler Theologie heute: Eine Rechenschaft*. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2010.

In this collection of non-systematic, ecumenically-engaged essays (the title means “Fragments of Radical Theology Today: An Account”), German Mennonite theologian Hans-Jürgen Goertz engages a broad range of topics on religious “radicality” that reflect both his life-long passion and earlier theological training plus his research into the historical Anabaptist tradition. He brings his notions of radicality to bear on current topics in theology, in reflection upon contemporary society and Christian heritage, and in questions ranging from the usability of history to postmodernity and the church-world dialectic. Peace theology plays a key role in several chapters.

There is no systematic organization to the book’s 22 chapters, some of them overlapping significantly, e.g., 8 (Conversation), 9 (Relationship), 18 (Dialogue–Unequal Partner [historical]), and 19 (Dialogue–Unequal Partner [theological]). Some topics appear as sub-topics under the rubric of “radicality,” such as 1 (Critique), 7 (Provisional Living), and 14 (Utopia). Other topics relate to the task of contemporary theology, including believer’s baptism, speech about God, and terms such as “peaceable” and “merciful.”

Goertz’s key interlocutors include Gordon Kaufman, John Howard Yoder, Paul Tillich, Luther, Wolfhart Pannenberg, Wolfgang Trillhaas (Goertz’s doctoral advisor), Schleiermacher, Zwingli, Michel Foucault, Müntzer, and Hans-Georg Gadamer. After radicality, the most frequently discussed subjects are the church and Anabaptism, followed by anticlericalism, creativity, freedom, history, justice, pacifism, peace, Reformation, truth, the Unconditional, and the world.

The author defines radicality this way: “That which is radical is not only a particularly daring or bold thought, rather, something is radical first and foremost, when there are still traces of experience that adhere to its emergence and it becomes actualized with these impulses toward a fundamental alteration in the realm of everyday experiences” (20). The Reformation was thus only radical inasmuch as the multi-faceted, anticlerical reform programs—including Luther’s and Zwingli’s—sought to “unhinge” the old medieval system and looked to divine salvation in everyday experience. Such an unhinging process is also at work in radicality today.

Goertz explains that the fragmentary process in which this radicalized reforming occurred necessarily took the form of a social movement characterized by spontaneity, fluctuating membership, and changing orientations. The institutional church was not its “organizational form” (21). The connection between radical theology and social movements is crucial for Goertz.

The author explains that such Reformation radicality was marked by experimentalism and provisionality, and “therefore suitable for mediating the feeling to the laity, of now turning away from the harm done by Christianity and being able to lend a new face to the church” (21). Further, radicality “cannot be regulated.” It usually occurs “when the discrepancy between sacred and profane experience has become too large or unbearable for many. Today it is less the discrepancy between the sacred, cultic realm and everyday experience than the discrepancy between sacred and profane language that can barely be bridged. Usually the efforts to overcome this discrepancy become oriented by means of a new reading of the Holy Scriptures” (22). Religious radicality is “what breaks through the ‘continuity of acquaintance’ and opens itself to the spirit, which blows where it wants. Radical theology, in its very approach, is pneumatologically-aligned theology” (23).

The subjects Goertz addresses in fragmentary ways are subjected to this mode of theological reflection rather than to systematic reasoning under conventional categories. As explained on the back cover and in the Foreword, following Karl Barth’s distinction between “regular” and “irregular” theology, Goertz’s reflections are “irregular” fragments that express what he considers vital issues.

Chapter 8 discusses the nature of dialogue, particularly in reference to Kaufman and Yoder, and chapter 9 comments further on the concept of relationality, future, and tradition, a topic that also arises in chapters 18-19. The historical section brings out Goertz’s views on the challenges of ecumenical dialogues held recently between Mennonites and Catholics, for example, and how history is held in tension, given the different elements of historian, theologian, and ecumenical processes.

The book will interest those engaged in German Protestant theology who share the key concerns of ecumenical theology and are prepared to consider the social dimension of reform both in its historical, Reformation-

era developments and in contemporary reflections on the nature of faith and life. The “fragments” will also be stimulating for Mennonites who share Goertz’s general quest for radicality.

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Wendy VanderWal-Gritter. *Generous Spaciousness: Responding to Gay Christians in the Church*. Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos, 2014.

In *Generous Spaciousness* Wendy VanderWal-Gritter draws on her knowledge as a practitioner with more than ten years’ experience as executive director of New Direction Ministries of Canada to promote and embody a response to gay Christians that encourages all members of the faith community to live into postures of trust, openness, and mutual respect regardless of sexual orientation. Her approach resists polarizing position statements of “for” or “against” regarding the morality of same-sex attraction. She writes primarily for North American evangelical Christians and for those committed to discerning what it means to live as disciples of Jesus Christ in all areas of life, including human sexuality. In the process she attends to a wide variety of perspectives on same-sex attraction and to the experiences of Christians who claim various sexual orientations. This is one of the ways she demonstrates how “generous spaciousness” functions as a “posture of openness that is inquisitive, personal, relational, and dependent on the Spirit” (26) and that reflects an understanding of unity in diversity (174).

After locating herself as an evangelical Christian and naming her context, the author demonstrates the need for generous spaciousness by highlighting the shortcomings of existing and historical responses to gay persons in evangelicalism. She argues that doubt and questions are a natural part of faith and that people’s experiences of attraction are diverse, and reiterates that Christians come to a variety of conclusions about same-sex attraction, e.g., same-sex attraction as rebellion, which requires repentance, or same-sex attraction as difference, which leads to celebration (70).

VanderWal-Gritter then shifts to articulating the key characteristics of generous spaciousness by exploring it as a response to people coming-